

C The Church

Lesson Commenced: _____

Lesson Checked: _____

This study looks at one of the more confusing and misunderstood doctrines of the Bible. People have all kinds of ideas as to what a church really is. Some people think it is a **building** (a cathedral, or some place of worship). Others think of a church as a **denomination** (a human organization), and speak of the “Catholic Church,” the “Presbyterian Church,” the “Baptist Church,” and so on. A very common misconception is that the “Church” consists of all born-again believers in the world — a kind of **invisible, universal** “church.”

Our task is to set these notions aside and determine what the **Bible** says a church is.

THE CHURCH IS A NEW TESTAMENT INSTITUTION

A. Look up: *Matthew 16:18*. This is the *FIRST* mention of the “church” in the Bible. Who founded (built) this first church? _____

B. Look up: *John 1:42*. What is the meaning of Peter’s name? _____

Note: Peter’s full name is *Simon Peter bar-Jona*. He is also elsewhere called Simeon.

C. Look up: *I Peter 2:3-4,6-8*. Whom did Peter identify as the “Rock” upon which the Church would be built? _____

Note: The Old Testament is primarily addressed to the **nation** of Israel. The New Testament is mainly addressed to **churches**. This is an important distinction — DO NOT CONFUSE THE TWO. The Bible makes this distinction in *I Corinthians 10:32*.

THE CHURCH IS AN ASSEMBLY

The word “church” (or “churches”) is found 114 times in the New Testament and is rendered from the Greek word “EKKLESIA” (ek·klay·see’·ah).

This word “ekklesia” has only one meaning: “a company of people called out to a specific place for a specific purpose.” (It has its roots in the democracies of the ancient Greek city-states, where the town crier would call the citizens to a meeting to conduct the city’s business.)

In *Matthew 16:18*, the Lord Jesus did not change the *meaning* of ekklesia; He distinguished it from other assemblies of the day by using the personal pronoun “MY.”

Thus, a New Testament church is the “Lord’s assembly.”

THERE ARE FOUR IMPORTANT FACTS CONCERNING AN “ASSEMBLY”:

A. An Assembly must be LOCAL:

1. People cannot “come together” and yet be all over the world!
For example, an automobile is an “assembly” of many and various parts: How absurd to think of it as being everywhere at the same time, a “universal car!”
2. In all but about 15 instances, where the word is used in a “generic” or “institutional” sense (that is, any church in general, no church in particular), the word “church” or “churches” is **always** used in connection with definite, geographic localities.
3. Look up the following Bible references and write down the actual cities or regions where some **real** churches were located:
Romans 16:1; I Corinthians 1:2; I Corinthians 16:1,19; II Corinthians 8:1; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 1:1; I Peter 5:13; Revelation 2:1,8,12,18, and Revelation 3:1,7.

4. For these reasons, the Bible knows nothing of a universal (catholic), worldwide “church.” The New Testament mentions many churches, all of which were meeting in various localities.

B. An Assembly must be VISIBLE:

1. People cannot “come together” and not be seen!
Many speak about the “invisible church” (thereby allowing them to move around in Christian circles). However, ALL the churches mentioned in the New Testament were “seeable.”
2. Look up: *Philippians 1:27; I Thessalonians 2:17 and 3:6.* Writing to the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica, Paul desired to come and S__ __ these assemblies.

C. An Assembly must be ORGANIZED:

1. An assembly is not a rabble (a disorderly mob). The word “assembly” implies organization.
 - a. Look up: Colossians 1:18. A Baptist church is figuratively likened to a _ _ _ _ .
The human body is an “assembly” of many parts. But does a random pile of skin, flesh, organs, bones, and so on, constitute a body? Of course not! They must be put together according to a plan. (Look up and read: Psalm 139:14.)
 - b. Look up: I Timothy 3:15. Here, a New Testament church is figuratively likened to a _ _ _ _ .
The house in which you live is also an “assembly.” But does a dumped pile of bricks, timber, plaster, nails, and so forth, constitute a house? Of course not! These items must be put together according to a plan (called a blueprint).
Read: I Corinthians 3:9-11,16. Notice the church at Corinth was likened to a temple (a structure).
2. A New Testament Baptist Church is to be organized, and the blueprint is given in the New Testament.

D. An Assembly must be CONSTITUTED:

1. By this we mean that it must be made with specified components. How absurd is it to assemble a motor vehicle out of milk, leaves, and uranium!? How ridiculous to build a house out of paper, bandages, and meat!
2. So too, a New Testament Church is not to be made up of just anything, or anyone! God specifies the components in the New Testament.
3. Write out: Acts 2:41.

(Circle the following words: RECEIVED, BAPTIZED, ADDED.)

This scripture specifies God’s qualifications (and order) for church membership:

- a. Gladly [voluntarily] R_ _ _ _ _ the Word (salvation).
↓
- b. Were B_ _ _ _ _ .
↓
- c. Were A_ _ _ _ _ unto them (the church). See: Acts 2:47; 5:14.

4. This is the **only** scriptural way by which people become members of a Baptist church: by salvation first, followed by baptism.

DEFINITION

A New Testament Baptist Church is an organized assembly of baptized believers.

THE CHURCH HAS A “HEAD”

Man-made religious organizations have their heads. They may be called popes, archbishops, presidents, moderators, superintendents, and so on. Each New Testament Baptist church also has a Head — but One Who is vastly different from any of the above.

Look up: Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 5:23-24.

- A. Who is the Head of each New Testament Baptist church? _____
- B. Each church is to be S _ _ _ _ _ to its Head.
- C. Look up: Galatians 3:1 and 5:7. In what way is a church subject to its Head?

Note: Jesus Christ is not a mere “figurehead.” Any “church” that is not subject to Him and His commandments is out of control.

No church has the right to make laws — it may only obey the laws already given by the Head through His Word.

A church without a living Head is dead!

THE CHURCH HAS OFFICERS

- A. **LOOK UP:** *Philippians 1:1.* What are the two offices in a church?

_____ and _____.

Note: The terms “bishop,” “elder,” and “pastor” are used interchangeably in the New Testament. We prefer to use the title *pastor* (which means “shepherd”) because the other titles have been turned into unbiblical ecclesiastical connotations.

B. LOOK UP: *I Timothy 3:1-7* and *Titus 1:6-9*. These references list the qualifications required for the office of pastor (bishop, or elder).

From both references, how many *different* qualifications do you count?

C. MY PASTOR(S):

1. Look up: *I Peter 2:25* and *5:4*. Who is the Chief Pastor (Shepherd) of my church? _____

2. Look up: *I Peter 5:2* and *Acts 20:28*. What does the Bible call a church in relation to its pastors? The F__ __ __ __.

3. According to *I Peter 5:2*, what is the chief duty of a pastor?

4. According to *Ephesians 4:12-14*, why has the Lord given my church a pastor-teacher or pastors-teachers?

5. According to *Acts 20:17,28-31*, how will my pastor(s) protect me?

6. According to *Hebrews 13:7*, I am to R__ __ __ __ __ my pastors and F__ __ __ __ __ them.

7. According to *Hebrews 13:17*, I am to O__ __ __ my pastors and S__ __ __ __ __ to their leadership and oversight of the church.

8. According to *I Thessalonians 5:12-13*, I am to E__ __ __ __ __ those over me in the Lord very __ __ __ __ __ because of their work's sake.

Faithful ministers are to be held in high reputation — *Philippians 2:29*.

How Should I Address My Pastor?

Many feel unsure as to what they should call their pastor(s) in conversation. There is no God-given title for a pastor, but it is not right to refer to him as “Reverend” or “Father” (see: *Psalms 111:9* and *Matthew 23:9*).

On the other hand, just as we train children not to call their parents, teachers, or others in authority by their first names out of respect for their position and authority, it is also proper to show similar respect to the men God puts over you in your church. The Bible says we should not despise dignities — *Jude 8; II Peter 2:10*.

My pastor prefers to be addressed as:

You and Your Pastor(s).

Give your pastor(s) your confidence, love, and encouragement. Pray for him regularly and consistently. Be his co-worker. Go to him with your difficulties and struggles; call him when in need. He is best able to help you with counsel from the Word of God.

Never make him your idol (keep your eyes on the Lord), but neither harshly criticize your pastor nor be a party to any scheming against him or his leadership.

Read: *I Thessalonians 5:12-13* and *I Timothy 5:17-19*.

Love and appreciate the wife of your pastor also. She holds no office in the church and has no authority, yet she is so important to her husband's ministry — as are his children (see: *I Timothy 3:4-5* and *Titus 1:6*).

THE CHURCH MAKES DECISIONS

A true New Testament Baptist Church never makes laws. It simply executes its Lord's commands as set forth in His Word. In a practical sense, however, a church often needs to make decisions in keeping with this principle. Unlike the hierarchical systems of many manmade religious bodies, Bible-believing Baptist churches practice what is known as a *congregational* form of church government, where the congregation under pastoral leadership decides how to implement God's will.

- A . Look up: *Acts 6:1-5*. Who chose the seven deacons? _____

- B. Look up: *Acts 1:15-26*. What preceded the vote of the whole church in electing a successor to Judas? P__ __ __ __ .

- C. According to *Matthew 18:17*, what is the highest decision-making body in spiritual matters? The C__ __ __ __ .

- D. According to *Matthew 18:18*, the decisions of a church congregation are ratified in H__ __ __ __ (i.e., by Christ Himself!).

A CHURCH IS AN INDEPENDENT INSTITUTION

A. EACH NEW TESTAMENT BAPTIST CHURCH IS INDEPENDENT:

In Acts 15, men from the church at Antioch came to the church at Jerusalem to address a matter of extreme doctrinal importance. After the church at Jerusalem determined the teaching of God’s Word on the matter (*verses 15-18*), the issue was resolved. Even then, the church at Jerusalem had NO AUTHORITY over the church at Antioch. Their sentence was that “...we trouble not them...;” and they simply wrote a letter making a request for deference. See: verse 19.

This is a far cry from the hierarchical religious systems devised by man, where the various congregations within a denomination are controlled and dictated to by “higher authorities.”

B. CHURCHES ARE TO BE SEPARATE FROM GOVERNMENTS:

1. The Word of God teaches a **complete** division between spiritual and secular authority. See: Matthew 22:21^b.
 - a. Christians are to be law-abiding citizens — *Romans 13:1-7.*
 - b. Christians may disobey a civil law **only** when they are compelled without recourse to disobey God’s law — *Acts 5:29.*
2. Governments should not be involved with the establishment or support of, or special favor toward, any religion. Government has a God-given duty to protect the right of free exercise of the religious faith (or not) of all its citizens.

C. CHURCHES MAY COÖPERATE WITH OTHER CHURCHES:

Independence does not mean isolationism. Baptist churches may scripturally work together in certain areas with other Baptist churches of like faith and order, provided such coöperation is voluntary, and does not violate the sovereignty, independence, and autonomy of each church.

1. New Testament churches worked together to help each other and support evangelism. See: I Corinthians 16:1-3; Acts 11:22-26; II Corinthians 8:19.
2. Churches coöperated to provide social relief — *Acts 11:27-30* and *Romans 15:25-26*. This financial assistance was a gift, not a loan.
3. New Testament churches were obviously involved in regional fellowship.
Galatians 1:2 — Churches [plural] of _ _ _ _ _ .
I Corinthians 16:19 — Churches [plural] of _ _ _ _ .
Galatians 1:22 — Churches [plural] of _ _ _ _ _ .

See also: Colossians 4:16, where two churches were to share the scriptures and other apostolic writings.

THE CHURCH IS A COMMISSIONED ORGANIZATION

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ established His churches to continue His work here on Earth. This is not a social ministry but a spiritual (evangelistic) one. Just before the Lord returned to Heaven, He left His Church with what is known as the “Great Commission.”
- B. Look up: Matthew 28:19-20. List below the verbs (actions) in these verses:
1. ___ ___ ye.
 2. ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ all nations.
 3. ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ them.
 4. ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ them to observe all things.
- C. This Great Commission is recorded in each of the four Gospels and in the book of Acts.
- Read them and see what the true mission of every Baptist church is: *Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21* and *Acts 1:8*. See also: I Corinthians 15:58 and *Revelation 22:17*.

THE CHURCH HAS ORDINANCES

There are TWO ordinances given to each New Testament Baptist Church to keep (“guard” and observe) — *I Corinthians 11:2*.

- A. BAPTISM — this will be taught in Study #9.
- B. The LORD’S SUPPER — this will be taught in Study #12.

THE CHURCH IS TO BE FINANCED

Christ has given His churches a plan to finance His work.

TITHING and STEWARDSHIP will be taught in Study #20.

THE CHURCH AND ME

Having learned these truths about the New Testament Church, the question becomes, “how should they be applied?”

Listed below are some practical suggestions for you to receive great personal and family blessings from your church:

A. JOIN IT:

1. It is God’s will for every born-again believer to be a member of a sound, Bible-believing, New Testament Baptist church.
2. Look up: Acts 2:47. “The L _ _ _ added to the _ _ _ _ _
D _ _ _ _ such as should be saved.”
3. Look up: I Corinthians 12:18. “God has _ _ _ the _ _ _ _ _ in
the _ _ _ _ .”

B. LOVE IT:

A Christian ought to love the things his Lord loves. Look up: Ephesians 5:25.
“Christ _ _ _ _ _ the _ _ _ _ _ and _ _ _ _ Himself for it.”

C. SUPPORT IT:

1. Your church is the place where you will grow, find comfort and fellowship, and serve the Lord. Write out: Hebrews 10:25.

2. Plan now to attend as many of the meetings of your church as you can. Decide in your heart never to miss a service (unless providentially hindered).

D. VALUE IT:

Look up: Acts 2:42. In what did those who were added to the church (verse 41) continue?

1. The apostle’s _ _ _ _ _ — see: Ephesians 4:11-15; I Timothy 4:6-7; II Peter 3:2 and Jude 17.
2. _ _ _ _ _ — see: I John 1:3.

3. Breaking of _ _ _ _ _ — eating — see: *verse 46* and *Jude 12^a*.

Note: This is not a partaking of the Lord's Supper, for three reasons: one, there is no mention of the "cup;" two, it was a progressive meal rather than a single memorial supper; and three, the Lord's Supper is distinguished from eating at home (*I Corinthians 11:20-22*).

4. _ _ _ _ _ S — see: *Acts 4:23-31; 12:12*.

READING ASSIGNMENT:

Read: *I Timothy chapter 3*.

MEMORIZATION:

Try to commit to memory: *Hebrews 10:25*.